



# ADVENT/CHRISTMAS WORSHIP

## CALL TO WORSHIP

LEADER: I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

**ALL: And in the Lord's word I hope.<sup>1</sup>**

LEADER: Advent is here – but Christmas is coming!

**ALL: I will prepare for God's Chosen One.**

**HYMN:** #109 All earth is waiting

## PRAYER

O God of our past, but the One who holds the future, our ancestors waited to receive freedom promised and a world where peace would reign.

“For a child has been born for us...”<sup>2</sup>

Praise to you, Jesus Christ, who showed us how to live in perfect peace.

When the time was right, you came into the world. Jesus Christ, a vulnerable baby brought perfect love to humanity.

“... a son given to us...”<sup>2</sup>

Praise to the God of love who came into the world to show us perfect love.

As we wait for Christmas Day to celebrate the gift of your Son to the world, may we not lose sight that we are partners with you in solutions to heal the world.

Forgive us, gracious God,

when we are filled with anxiety because the details to prepare for this season overwhelm us and we do not experience the wonder of Christmas

when we miss an opportunity to bring hope

when we fail to act in love

when we are impatient for your kingdom to be peaceful.

O God, forgive us and renew us by your grace that we may live in this waiting time in anticipation of your coming into the world through Jesus Christ. Amen

## ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

We are forgiven. We can be filled with hope, for Jesus, born a babe, became our risen Christ to bring us new life. Thanks be to God for his mercy. Amen

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 11: 1 -3

Matthew 1:18-25

**HYMN:** #144 Twas in the moon of wintertime OR #149 Away in a manger

## JOSEPH'S STORY

Christmas is coming. Probably your preparations began months ago. There was the dinner to plan. Guests had to be chosen and invited. Christmas lights and trees are appearing on your street and in your home. Oh, and those gifts – did you start shopping in the summer or start yesterday? Yes, my friends, Christmas is coming. Are you ready? Are you excited?

I'm sure you are hearing Christmas music. Is it driving you crazy or do the carols bring you joy? Have you had time to breathe and feel the freshness of a new season? The day to celebrate Christ's birth is almost here.

Oh my! All the preparations we make for one or two days of celebration! But it's worth the worry and it's worth the wait.

I recall that in my childhood we always had a Christmas Pageant at our church during the Advent season. Remember your own favourite version of the play? It took weeks of hectic preparation, but it always came off without a hitch. It always brought joy to everyone. You knew Christmas was near when it was Pageant Sunday.

The Christmas play focusses on Mary and the baby Jesus. She is holding her newborn child with a divine smile on her face filled with love. The gospel stories tell us a lot about Mary starting with the conversation with the angel, then her visit to Elizabeth and the journey to Bethlehem.

Have you ever thought about Joseph's role in the Christmas story? He is in the background or behind the manger, standing tall and silent. I think many things must have been going through his mind during that dramatic moment when his first son was born in a crude stable surrounded by cows, donkeys, and camels.

Think about it. Joseph's life was going down a good path. All was in place for a successful career and a respected family life. He had a good trade as a carpenter, and he was betrothed to Mary. This match was a very good one - he was from the family line of King David and Mary's family was respected in the synagogue.

Then boom! Mary was going to have a baby! Joseph was a decent man with strong moral values, and he did not want Mary shunned publicly. His plan was to "dismiss her quietly" (Matthew 1:19) as now both their lives were in tatters. Through one dream, everything changed. An angel of the Lord came to Joseph imploring him to take Mary for his wife. The angel also informed Joseph that the baby was special to God. Joseph was given the name of the child – Jesus.

We know the difficult circumstances of Jesus' birth. First, Mary and Joseph had to make the long journey to Bethlehem where they were required to register for the nation-wide census. With so many people in the small town, there was no readily available accommodation. Mary was very near the end of her pregnancy. So, a stable became the place for a holy birth. The Gospel of Luke records most of the details of Jesus birth and the closing thought is that Mary treasured all these things and kept them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

Joseph's part in the birth is not mentioned in the gospel stories. We don't get a glimpse of what he thought or 'treasured in his heart.' The hymn writer of the Anglo-Irish carol "The snow lay on the ground"<sup>3</sup> has captured Joseph's role in these beautiful lines:

And Joseph too was there to tend the Child, to guard him and protect his mother mild....

I wonder.

The final straw for Joseph was Herod's decision to kill all the boy children under two years of age. Another dream – another drastic message from God. Leave! Flee to Egypt! Away they go, the little family, not knowing what the future held. Would they be able to return to their beloved Nazareth or be reunited with their families?

I marvel at Joseph's obedience to God's interventions in his life. When God came so dramatically to Joseph, he did not ignore the angel's message. It changed the plan he had for his life, but he trusted that this turn in his life was from God. Joseph took responsibility for his young wife and the child Jesus. Having to leave home and kindred when Herod's terrible reign of terror happened, Joseph led his little family to safety and kept them safe and secure. Joseph was faithful to the God he knew. The same God who had led the Israelites from slavery to wilderness to home. Joseph was confident in God's guidance and grace. That is why he was able to let go of his life's plan and fulfill God's role for him in Jesus young life.

I wonder how we handle such twists in our life's journey. Are we so afraid of God's power that we follow blindly or are we so confident in God's grace that we go boldly?

Think on these things this advent season:

This is the season for being hopeful and for believing in a God of endless possibilities.

This is the season to pray for peace and for resting in the peace of Christ.

This is the season to experience joy by giving and receiving the gifts of God.

This is the season of love .... "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,

so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>4</sup>

AMEN

**HYMN:** #158 The hands that first held Mary’s child

## PRAYER

Eternal God, we come to you this day in great anticipation of your birth among us. We thank you for your greatest gift of love – Jesus, Emmanuel.

We thank you for friends and family who join in our celebrations.

We thank you for people and organizations who generously give their time and money to bring Christmas joy to children and youth.

Gracious God, who showed us the way to live as disciples of Christ, make us mindful of our responsibility to bring a word of hope and an action of love to those in need. May we have hearts that discern how to make meaningful the gospel which we cherish.

We pray that in your mercy, those who sleep without shelter will find a safe place and those who lack enough food will be given a feast.

We pray that in your mercy, those who are overworked will find balance and those who have no work will find it.

We pray that in your mercy, the people new to our country will be welcomed, and the strangers among us and the invisible ones that we walk around will grab our attention.

Lord Jesus, you are coming in glory to bring the fullness of peace, healing, and justice. Teach us to wait when you would have us wait. Teach us to act when you would have us act, even if it spoils a plan we have made for ourselves. Fill us up with the expectation of your perfect kingdom that we cannot help but be part of it now.

These things we ask, trusting in your steadfast love and faithfulness. Amen

## OFFERING

God freely gave his Son to the world, just as he freely gives us all we need for abundant living. Let us return a portion of those gifts to be used for the work of showing love to the world.

## OFFERING PRAYER

“What shall I give him, poor as I am? Give my heart.”<sup>5</sup>

O God, accept these humble offerings for the mission of your church.

Bless these gifts given in your name that they bring hope for a better life for someone in need. Amen

**HYMN:** #153 Joy to the world

## COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

Be patient, beloved ones, and let your hearts be joyful,

For the coming of the Lord is near.

May the God of love fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

### REFERENCES:

1 – Psalm 130:5

2 – Isaiah 9:6 (New Revised Standard Version bible 1989)

3 – The Book of Praise (157 verse 3) Words: public domain

4 – John 3:16 (New Revised Standard bible 1989)

5 – The Book of Praise (145 verse 3) Words: public domain

6 – Romans 15:13 (New Revised Standard bible 1989)

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